MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Walking and Biking in California: A Matter of National Security

How Childhood Obesity Today Risks the Military's Viability Tomorrow

One-third of young adults is too heavy for military service

Seventy percent of young Californians ages 17 to 24 could not join the military if they wanted to. One of the leading reasons is obesity—nearly a third of young adults nationwide would not qualify to serve their country because they are too overweight. Helping children achieve a healthy weight is crucial for national security.

Children are more obese and less active

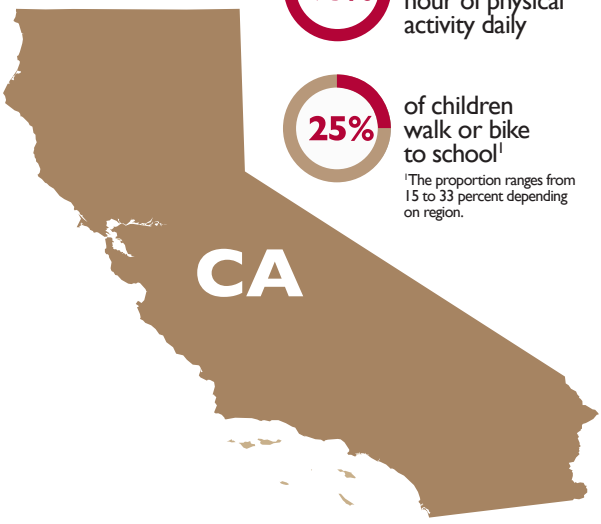
Thirty years ago, just 5.5 percent of the nation's children were obese. That proportion has since tripled—today, 17 percent of American children are obese and the average 10-year-old is 12 pounds heavier compared to a child in 1970. Meanwhile, the amount of time that Americans spend on physical activity has dropped by a third since 1965.

Walking and biking to school: 70 percent decrease since 1969

Four decades ago, walking and biking to school, a friend's house or the center of town was commonplace—a national survey found that 48 percent of children walked or biked to school in 1969. Since then, this number has dropped by more than 70 percent, while the number of children being driven to school has increased by a proportionate amount. This reversal is due to a number of factors, including parental concerns about safety; poor infrastructure (including more roads being built without sidewalks); and increasing distances between schools and homes.

FACTS ABOUT CALIFORNIA

70 percent of young Californians could not join the military if they wanted to — and obesity is a leading reason.



30% of children are overweight or obese

75% of children do not get the recommended hour of physical activity daily

25% of children walk or bike to school[1]

[1]The proportion ranges from 15 to 33 percent depending on region.

WHO WE ARE

Mission: Readiness is the national security organization of more than 550 retired generals, admirals and other senior military leaders who call for policies and investments that will help young Americans succeed in school and later in life, thus enabling more young adults to join the military if they choose to do so.

State *Safe Routes to School* programs are critical to physical activity

Walking or biking to school helps children achieve, on average, more than a quarter of the daily hour of exercise recommended by experts. Research shows that Safe Routes to School programs can result in walking and biking increases of roughly 40 percent over five years. Currently, close to 350 schools receive state funding for Safe Routes to School, a small portion of California's 10,000+ schools.

California's educators, community leaders and policymakers can strengthen walking and biking options

California **educators and community leaders can create new** Safe Routes to School programs by bringing together stakeholders, identifying community needs, developing and acquiring funding for projects and measuring results.

California educators and community leaders can also **strengthen existing** Safe Routes to School programs by recruiting program champions and volunteers, gaining publicity for successes, advocating for changes to school, district or local government policies and creating a permanent Safe Routes to School committee.

California **policymakers** should support Safe Routes to School and broader infrastructure improvements such as creating sidewalks, separated bike lanes and trails and encouraging new schools to be located within walking or biking distance of residential areas.

Endnotes are available upon request.

Safe Routes to School programs can result in walking and biking increases of roughly 40 percent over five years.

Marin County's Safe Routes to School program, for example, led to a 60 percent increase in walking to school among its students. #SRTS



This brief is part of a series of state issue briefs making the link between children's walking and biking habits and national security. To learn more, visit

www.MissionReadiness.org/SafeRoutesToSchool